

VZCZCXRO6400
PP RUEHIK
DE RUEHAH #1615/01 3491134
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 151134Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3907
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6004
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3698
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3557
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4246
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1316
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4185

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001615

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; EEB;
COMMERCE FOR DSTARKS/EHOUSE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [EINT](#) [ECPS](#) [BTIO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMEN STATE-OWNED COMPANY ANNOUNCES 3G SERVICES,
BUT NOT SO FAST...

REF: ASHGABAT 1116

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¶1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

¶2. (SBU) On December 12, TM Cell, the state-owned cell phone company run by the Ministry of Communications, began to offer 3rd Generation (3G) services to cell phone customers across the country. Tech-savvy customers, who were operating on a more Western definition of 3G, were disappointed to learn that 3G in Turkmenistan did not translate into faster connectivity and an ability to easily upload and download various media on their cell phones. Although rates for the 3G services are considered inexpensive, it is unlikely that customers will flock to TM Cell's 3G service, once they realize it works only as fast as the dial-up they have at home.

¶3. (SBU) By definition, 3G is a family of service standards crafted by the International Telecommunications Union, which includes mobile formats that enable cell phone users to, in essence, turn their phones into personal computers. 3G in most countries allows for services such as wide area voice telephone, multimedia message service (MMS) video calls, and the ability to receive and send wireless data at high speeds. The 3G service now available in Turkmenistan, however, operates on a frequency that will only allow for MMS transmission to other TM Cell clients, as the company does not have contracts with cell phone companies outside of Turkmenistan. More important, the Internet connectivity rate for the Turkmen 3G service is only 56Kb/second, which will not accommodate services like Internet television, Youtube video content, and other video content programming that is standard on most 3G platforms.

¶4. (SBU) TM Cell markets its cell phone packages under the name Altyn Asyr, a term coined by former Turkmen President

Niyazov which means the "Golden Age," but most computer-literate contacts we spoke with consider Turkmenistan's telecommunications substandard at best. Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov continues to tout Internet access as the right of every Turkmen citizen, tasking the Ministry of Communications with the burden of making that a reality (reftel). Berdimuhamedov's positive comments resulted in foreign telecommunications companies flocking to the country's International Telecommunications Exhibition/Conference in September. These foreign companies hoped to bring much-needed telecommunications technology and capabilities to the country, but no major deals have been signed, and the majority of Turkmen with Internet have antiquated dial-up access, as it is really the only option available. Some Ashgabat residents with dial-up told us they wake up in the early morning hours to avoid peak Internet traffic, to obtain a fast enough Internet connection to check emails, surf the Internet, and maybe use Skype to phone family and friends outside of Turkmenistan if they're really lucky.

15. (SBU) COMMENT. The arrival of 3G in Turkmenistan was not announced in local or national media, and many Ashgabat residents accidentally stumbled upon it while paying their cell phone bills at TM Cell. For those who need faster Internet capability for business, school, and personal use, the Turkmen version of 3G is only a small step ahead of the current dial up service that most have at home. If the Turkmen Government really wants to be seen as an innovator in providing high-tech communications products and services to its citizens, it will have to partner with foreign companies with the technology and know-how necessary to bring Turkmenistan into the modern communications age. END

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COMMENT.
CURRAN